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Same As It Ever Was *by Andrew Burke*

Outside the shops the footpath is
thin and interrupted
by parking signs. I tell you this because
along comes an up-market gopher
with tall zipped-up plastic walls
like an oblong of shower curtains
driven through the drizzle of
a spring day. It parks outside the chemist
and an old hand unzips a side panel
carefully. Tall and stooped, rickety on
frail legs, Merv leans on his walking stick
and steps out, then just as carefully
zips the panel up. He travels slowly
on worn slippers, his stick as third leg.
Down the path come two lads,
twenty or so, cocky, sure of
their balance and future.
Mrs O'Reilly, grandson's hand
in hers, moves closer to the wall.
The boys don't notice. On legs
swift and sure, a teenage schoolgirl
walks past, hips alive, and as she passes
she bends and waves at the boy.
The big boys wave back,
mockingly. They know her sister,
the one with a rose tattoo. This one's
younger, solitary, waiting
at the lights, balancing first on

one leg, then the other. Just now
a gleeful burst of young children
runs down the street, gold and green
streamers flying. Merv pauses
in the doorway to let them pass.
No respect, he thinks, no respect anymore.
His gopher has left a thin stream
on the footpath and one whooping boy
takes a tumble, no worse than
a fall at footy but today
it's a fright and he rubs
his coccyx. The chemist's girl
comes to help. Merv waves
his stick to Shoo! them away,
then slowly zips up a panel,
walking stick on his arm
Hoagy Carmichael style. I
watch from the prompter's pit
how they play their roles so truly. I'm
at The Globe when my wife returns,
shopping bags in each arm. I start
the car. She says, 'This lot'd cost
a pretty penny without a pension card.'
I steer out and over a speed hump,
windows up tight against the wind.

Andrew Burke is an Australian writer with books of poetry published, small plays decades ago, short stories in literary mags, and a novel waiting to be published.